

Talking Points

Press Conference on Mississippi Gulf Water and Wastewater Plan

Tuesday, January 9, 2007

Gulfport, Mississippi

- I am pleased to announce today that the Mississippi Gulf Water and Wastewater Plan has been submitted for approval to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.
- I expect HUD to approve the master plan.
- I expect the new or enhanced infrastructure projects that will emerge under the plan to better serve the needs of local communities and their residents as areas grow along the post-Katrina coast.
- Let me recap the history of how this plan developed.
- The Governor's Commission on Recovery, Rebuilding and Renewal recommended a regional utility authority for managing sewer, water, storm water, and other utilities across the six coastal counties.

- Following the Commission's recommendations, the Legislature created the Gulf Coast Region Utility Board and utility authorities in each county in 2006.
- Governor and Mississippi's Congressional Delegation obtained appropriations of over \$5 billion through U.S. Dept. of Housing and Urban Dev. to assist in hurricane recovery.
- Out of this money, the Mississippi Gulf Water and Wastewater Plan was prepared under contractual authority between MDEQ and MS Engineering Group, Inc.
- Plan Objective: To identify the most critical water, wastewater, and storm water infrastructure needs within the region, prioritize these needs, and develop an implementation plan for allocation of the funds. The improvements are intended to support existing and future growth patterns, particularly as realized through new housing construction, and to promote economic development.

- As I mentioned, the goal of this plan is to provide new or enhanced infrastructure and to locate new facilities out of harm's way, not to simply repair systems damaged by the storm. Funding programs through FEMA address simple repair.
- To maximize cost effectiveness, the Plan focuses on the Gulf Region, more than on the individual units of government, and encourages centralization and consolidation of infrastructure where practicable.
- The Plan also provides infrastructure in areas of current and projected development, based on demographic data and other conditions relevant to growth, and supports location of facilities in areas less vulnerable to hurricane impact.
- The basic approach was to develop a regional infrastructure "backbone" on which a more localized system of improvements could develop as necessary.

- Over 300 projects were recommended from stakeholders. In order to be eligible, projects were required to be HUD compliance, to provide infrastructure in areas not served or underserved, and to be implementable by 2010.
- The evaluation process used five criteria:
 - The extent to which the project accommodates the expected demographic changes, recovery, and development.
 - The project's impact on economic development and recovery.
 - The project's cost effectiveness, affordability, and benefits for the region.
 - The time required to implement the project.
 - The project's necessity to correct or minimize an imminent future public or environmental health threat.
- \$25 million was approved initially to fund "emergency projects". Thus far, applications have been received from Poplarville for a water system and from Jackson County for a decentralized waste treatment facility.

PUBLIC COMMENT

- The Draft Plan was published in November 2006. Through a public comment period, many additional needs were identified, evaluated, and found as valid. As a result, additional funds were made available for the regional plan.
- With the assistance of the cities, counties, and other organizations, significant infrastructure needs were identified beyond those recommended in the Draft Plan.
- After review, many of these additional needs were determined to be important in achieving the objectives of the Plan.
- After the public comment period revealed additional regional infrastructure needs, \$26 million was made available as an addition to regional infrastructure programs.

- The public comment period also revealed that areas in Hancock County were “ultra-distressed” and had suffered too much loss to provide the distribution or collection systems to benefit from the regional “backbone” system. \$47 million was added to the plan to provide systems in these “ultra-distressed” areas.
- An additional \$55 million was added to increase infrastructure capacity in cities where pre-storm infrastructure was inadequate for projected growth and development. Although FEMA is restoring existing infrastructure to conditions that existed prior to the Hurricane, enhancing the infrastructure is necessary to adequately promote and accommodate future development.
- Based on public comment, the total plan has increased from \$500 to \$630 million.